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Proudly representing Eastern Washington in the United States House of Representatives

INSIDE CONGRESS
FOR WEEK ENDING FEBRUARY 15, 2002
by United States Representative
George R. Nethercutt, Jr.

Welcome to this week's edition of Inside Congress. I am glad to share with you a little of my work in the national legislature. Please follow the listed links or contact my office for more information on the topics mentioned here.

BORDER PATROL WILL DOUBLE IN EASTERN WASHINGTON

The number of border security personnel working in the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) Spokane Sector will be doubled soon. This addition will grow the number of border patrol agents from 45 to 85, and will add two new administrators. The Spokane Sector runs from Oroville, Wash., to the Continental Divide in western Montana.

Congress provided additional funding in last year's spending bills for Northern border security, including an authorization to triple the number of Border Patrol, INS inspectors and Customs Service at the Northern Border. As co-chair of the Northern Border Caucus, I supported this funding.

The addition of 42 new personnel will be part of 145 new border security personnel being added to the Washington state-Canadian border. This includes INS land-border inspectors, seaport inspectors, permanent Border Patrol Agents and a Special Agent in Charge of terrorism investigation.

This news is reassuring for the people of Washington state. Enhancing our border security is key to keeping our homeland secure.

QUESTIONING SPOKESMAN FOR ECO-TERRORIST GROUP

I testified this week before the House Resources Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health. Acts of violence and vandalism by the Earth Liberation Front were the focus of the hearing. The group has claimed responsibility for more than \$40 million in property damage in North America since 1997. In December, ELF and its partner organization, the Animal Liberation Front (ALF),

together claimed responsibility for 137 crimes, including vandalism and arson during 2001. Last year FBI Director Louis Freeh identified eco-terrorist organizations such as ELF as one of America's primary domestic terrorism threats.

Craig Rosebraugh, former spokesman for ELF, was a witness at the hearing. He invoked the Fifth Amendment to over 50 questions, except one of my questions on whether he was a citizen of the United States, to which he answered yes.

Last year I introduced legislation to stop eco-terrorists and punish those who commit crimes. The Agroterrorism Prevention Act of 2001, H.R. 2795, would broaden current definitions to protect all plant and animal research, enhance penalties for animal or plant enterprise terrorism, allow the FBI to investigate crimes under the Racketeer Influenced Corrupt Organizations Act, and establish an incident clearinghouse to strengthen local law enforcement efforts.

Agriculture, forestry and science have been under attack in Washington state for years, and constituents have long expressed their concerns with criminal activity that threatens both their lives and their livelihood. I met with one scientist recently who told me she has been physically threatened by radicals and fears for her safety. 'Yet all I want to do is cure breast cancer,' she says. It's time that we draw a line in the sand and let eco-terrorists know, we will not stand for terrorism of any kind in our homeland.

LEGISLATION

This week I became a co-sponsor of the **Rural Equity Payment Index Reform Act**, H.R. 3569, introduced by Rep. Doug Bereuter of Nebraska. Currently, Medicare payments to physicians in rural parts of the country are less than they are to their urban counterparts in spite of the fact that there are fewer doctors and it's more expensive to provide medical services in rural areas. The REPaIR Act would make sure physicians in rural areas get the increase they need. Doctors in Colville are every bit as valuable as those in Chicago. Fixing this disparity is important to continuing quality health care in rural areas.

I also became a cosponsor of H.R. 1020, the **Railroad Track Modernization Act** of 2001. This bill will authorize a much-needed capital improvement grant program to rehabilitate Class II and Class III railroad lines. Each year, thousands of miles of rail lines are abandoned because of inadequate resources to fix the problem. Since 1970, 40 percent of Washington state's active rail lines have been abandoned. With these improvements, larger 286,000-pound rail cars could use the system, and at higher speeds. According to the Washington State Department of Transportation, continuation of service on these branch lines saves the state \$21 million per year in avoided roadway maintenance costs. Our transportation infrastructure must be maintained in order to preserve eastern Washington's agriculture and natural resource-based economy. I look forward to working with the bill's sponsor, Representative Jack Quinn, to pass this legislation.

In addition, I wrote a letter to House Agriculture Committee Chairman Larry Combest in support of a marketing loan/loan deficiency payment program for dry peas, lentils and chickpeas. I also signed a letter this week to the Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman requesting that USDA make an immediate bonus purchase of asparagus for food programs. This assistance is needed to offset damage to the domestic asparagus market created by the Andean Trade Preference Act, which permits countries that traditionally grow coca, from which cocaine is derived, to import certain crops duty free to discourage the production of narcotics.

ON THE FLOOR

Here is a recap of the legislative activity for the week:

H.R. 2998, provides for the establishment of Radio Free Afghanistan. This bill authorizes the Broadcasting Board of Governors to make grants for surrogate radio broadcasting by RFE/RL, Incorporated (formerly known as Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty) to the people of Afghanistan in native languages. The bill passed by a vote of 421 - 2. I voted yes.

H.R. 2356 Campaign Reform Act of 2001, known as Shays-Meehan. The bill passed by a vote of 240-189 at almost 3 a.m. I voted no on the final version of the bill.

WANTED: CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM THAT'S CONSTITUTIONAL

This week the House voted on the controversial Shays-Meehan Campaign Finance Reform bill, H.R. 2356. It passed by a vote of 240-189. I have long believed that substantial campaign finance reform is necessary, but I could not in good faith vote for a bill that abridges First Amendment rights, provides extraordinary power to the media without recourse, will be difficult to enforce according to the Federal Election Commission's Chairman, and threatens the existence of political parties.

Issues that should have been addressed to reform the system but were not, include: 1) complete disclosure of campaign contributions to the FEC and having all information about the donation displayed on-line within 24 hours; 2) eliminating forced contributions to candidates by labor unions and corporations without the consent of the worker or investor; and 3) imposing limits on, or regulating "soft money."

Several items in the bill will likely be declared unconstitutional. One item is the total ban on soft money at the federal level. In *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976), the Supreme Court affirmed that giving money to and spending money on political campaigns is a core First Amendment activity. Supporters of Shays-Meehan attempted to frame soft money in the worst possible light. While the bill violates the right to free speech at the federal level, it ironically provided that soft money donations of up to \$60 million per election cycle could be contributed to state and local political parties.

A second item is the section of the bill that severely restricts the ability to run issue advertisements 60 days before a general election and 30 days before a primary election that refer to a federal candidate. While citizens are muzzled during the most crucial time in an election, the media will remain free to speak. Why should corporations that happen to own a network, such as General Electric (NBC) or Time Warner (CNN) have unlimited rights to free speech while other companies and citizens do not? Why should Dan Rather and Geraldo Rivera have the ability to provide their thoughts to millions, while other citizen organizations are muted?

Media domination could result in strengthened ties between candidates and wealthy individuals, many of them outside the candidate's district. Under the bill, candidates would have to aggressively solicit hard money donations from these people to counter negative press. Hard money, which has been increased by reformers in the bill, has a greater potential to result in closer ties between a candidate and a particular "interest" since this money is donated directly.

American citizens hunger to participate in the political process. Though this bill dramatically alters the way political money is solicited and spent, it will not take money out of politics. Money is a form of support and political speech. Money corrupts those with weak constitutions, but ideology dictates action far more (See Wall Street Journal Article at www.house.gov/nethercutt/cfr.pdf). Taking gifts for favors is already illegal. I vote my conscious, regardless of who may choose to contribute to my campaign.

The Senate must still agree to the differences between the two bills. If the bill is signed by President Bush and becomes law, I anticipate a number of immediate legal challenges.

SCHEDULE

I met with Dr. Robert Pasternack, Assistant Secretary in the Department of Special Education about the Spokane Guilds and the Neuromuscular School Center. Sharon York with the Washington State Association of Retarded Citizens, and Spokane residents Lance Moorhouse, Sandi Haupt, and Greg Falk met with me at my office to discuss developmental disabilities. Col. Randy Fullhart, Commander of the 92nd Air Refueling Wing at Fairchild Air Force Base was kind enough to pay me a visit. I spoke over the telephone with Bonneville Power Administration Administrator Steve Wright as well. Kristen Luber of St. George's High School was in town for the National Young Leaders Conference and came to meet me in the Capitol.

I attended a Defense Subcommittee hearing and heard from Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Gen. Richard B. Meyers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the budget overview for this year. CIA officials gave me and other members a counter-terrorism update in a classified Appropriations Defense Subcommittee briefing this week. Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman told myself and other members of the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee that the President will stay committed to providing \$73.5 billion in new Farm Bill money and is concerned several provisions of the Senate's version of the Farm Bill. The Secretary also said that the Department is already working on implementing parts of the next Farm Bill that they think will be included in the final version. In the Interior Subcommittee, I participated in a meeting concerning the Department of Interior's mismanagement of Indian Trust Fund accounts.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

I always enjoy hearing from you. Please feel free to contact me if I can be of assistance to you in any matter. Here are some of the ways you may reach me, especially if you know of others who may want to receive this report each week or would like to be removed from this mailing list:

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